Answering Sensitive Questions: Creating a Safe Space for Youth

Expanding Our Experience and Expertise:
Implementing Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Programs
Baltimore, MD
March 12-14, 2012

Jill Farris, MPH
Director of Training and Education
Teenwise Minnesota







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This session's objectives:

By the end of this session, participants will:

- Learn guidelines for answering sensitive questions related to sexuality;
- Practice answering young people's questions about sensitive sexuality topics with their colleagues;
- Share challenging scenarios with colleagues and create strategies to address these scenarios; and
- Understand how the ability to answer sensitive questions creates a safe space for youth and creates a more effective facilitator





Who's in the room?

- Direct service providers
- Managers/Administrators
- Others?







Types of Questions

- 1. Requests for Information
- 2. "Am I Normal?"
- 3. "Permission-seeking"
- 4. Shock Questions
- 5. Personal Beliefs







Requests for Information

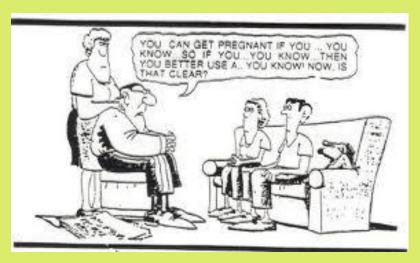
- If you know the answer, great. If not, it's okay to say "I don't know".
- Answer in an age-appropriate manner
 - Don't give complicated answers; avoid technical jargon
- If the question contains values component,
 make sure various points of view are presented
- Refer to group agreements if inappropriate or problematic question





"Am I Normal?" Questions

- Validate their concerns
 - "Many young people worry that…"
 - "I get that question a lot"
- Refer to other resources as appropriate
 - Parents, clergy, family physician, school counselor, etc.







Permission-Seeking Questions

- "Is it normal to..."
 - Avoid use of the word "normal"
 - Stick to the facts
- "Did you...when you were my age?"
 - Redirect to group agreements
 - Establish boundaries related to answering personal questions
- Enforce universal values
 - Exploitation is wrong, responsibility is good, everyone deserves to be safe and respected, etc.





Shock Questions

- Reword question using medically accurate language
 - Establish ground rule about using proper vocabulary
- Refer to group agreements if inappropriate or problematic question







Personal Questions

- Establish boundaries ahead of time
 - Depending on scenario, it can be okay to answer
- If you do respond, present your view as one of many
- Share to build group cohesion or demonstrate empathy – never to meet your own needs or win favor with youth
- DON'T share information about personal sexual practices or behaviors





Practice!

- Pair with one other person
- Take turns playing the role of the facilitator and the role of the young person
 - DO: practice as though you are actually answering the question
 - DON'T: paraphrase "Well, I'd probably say something like..."
- Continue until both people have played both roles





Debrief

- Is the answer factually correct?
- Was anything left out?
- Would this answer be acceptable to the parents

in your community? Why or why not?







General tips

- Buy yourself time
 - "That's a great question."
 - "Thanks for asking that."
 - "A lot of people ask me that question."
- Include many points of view in your answer
 - "For some...for others...for you"
- Use an anonymous question box
- Caution using the words "choose to have sex"
 - 7% of females report that their first sexual intercourse was non-voluntary, especially with older partner





General tips continued

STOP, DROP and ROLL

- Stop talking and think about the question you've been asked
- Drop your opinions and personal judgments, values, etc.
- Roll the question into a discussion topic for the group
 - "That's a great question, I'd like to hear what you think..."
 - "Has anyone else been thinking about this and, if so, what are your thoughts?"

Check for understanding

– "Does that answer your question?"





General tips continued

- Be aware of your non-verbal communication
 - Body language can communicate distaste or disagreement
- If youth only consider one point of view, facilitator can introduce other ideas
- DO: laugh, turn red, stutter
 - It's okay to have a reaction to questions, especially those intended to shock
 - You're human! ☺





General tips continued

- "What happens...?" questions
 - Typically asked by younger adolescents
 - Consider physical and emotional consequences of these scenarios









Youth won't remember every fact you communicate, but...

- They will remember if they felt comfortable, validated or reassured
- Convey positive sexual health attitudes through your words, tone of voice and facial expressions





Resources

- FLASH Curriculum Guide to Answering Student Questions: http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/personal/famplan/educators/ <u>s/teachers.aspx</u>
- ETR RECAPP Skills for Educators: http://www.etr.org/recapp/index.cfm?fuseaction=pages.EducatorSkillsDetail-8
 http://www.etr.org/recapp/index.cfm?fuseaction=pages.EducatorSkillsDetail-8
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 http://www.etr.org/recapp-index.cfm
 http://www.etr.org/recapp-
- Planned Parenthood Talking to Kids about Sex and Sexuality:
 http://www.plannedparenthood.org/parents/talking-kids-about-sex-sexuality-37962.htm
- Michigan Department of Education:
 http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/3 Answering Sensitive Question
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Thank you!



Jill Farris, MPH
Director of Training and Education
Teenwise Minnesota
1619 Dayton Avenue, Suite 111
Saint Paul, MN 55104
tel. 651-644-1447 x18
fax. 651-644-1417

www.teenwisemn.org



